Sociological Research Online

The dereliction tourist: ethical issues of conducting research in areas of industrial ruination

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Abstract: Dereliction tourism is the act of seeking out abandoned industrial sites as sites of aesthetic pleasure, leisure or adventure. Drawing on research in areas of industrial ruination in Russia, the UK and North America, this article examines the role of the 'dereliction tourist' as a way of critically reflecting on the ethics of 'outsider' research. Ethical problems are associated with both dereliction tourism and ethnographic research in areas of industrial decline, including voyeurism, romanticization, and the reproduction of negative stereotypes about marginal people and places. However, both dereliction tourism and ethnographic research also share more positive ethical possibilities through offering alternative ways of imagining places and raising social justice awareness of issues related to deprivation and blight. Through considering the ambivalent figure of the dereliction tourist in relation to ethnography, this article advances a way of being in the research field through intrinsic ethical reflection and practice.

Keywords: outsider researcher, research ethics, industrial ruins, dereliction tourism, ethnography, research methods

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Introduction

Industrial ruins are fascinating. They have a strange appeal, with their grand scale, decaying beauty, otherworldly feel, and evocation of distant eras. They capture the imagination, like apocalyptic and dystopian novels. An increasing number of websites, books, and photography exhibitions document the aesthetic spectacle of industrial ruins (cf. Austin and Doerr 2010; Marchand and Meffre, 2011; Higgins, 1999; MacKenzie, 2001; Vergara, 1999). This trend has been dubbed 'ruins porn' (Clemens 2011; Mullins 2012) as a metaphor for the aesthetic, sensory and self-satisfied pleasure of dereliction tourism, and it has become so widespread that is almost a cliché. But industrial ruins are only fascinating for some people, typically outsiders, passing by, snapping photos. Indeed, '(t)o view something as a ruin is already to have a perspective… where some people see ruins, others see homes situated within painful processes of transformation.' (Mah 2012: 11)

Despite the ethical problems inherent within ruins porn, I must admit that I share a fascination with industrial ruins. In fact, my original inspiration for undertaking research on industrial ruination (Mah 2012) came from my experience as a tourist. I was on a cross-country road trip, and when I passed through the Rust Belt of North America and witnessed the vast decaying factories around Chicago, Detroit, Buffalo, and Niagara Falls, I was amazed by the sheer scale of industrial ruination. What had happened to these places? During the course of my research in areas of industrial decline, I soon became critical of the limitations of aesthetic perspectives. These accounts romanticized industrial ruins; they left out the people. The cultural historian Solnit (2006, p. 90) writes about the relationship between art and ruins: 'An urban ruin is a place that has fallen outside the economic life of the city, and it is in some way an ideal home for the art that also falls outside the ordinary production and consumption of the city.' But what if the ruin is a reflection of the lack of economic life in the city? What if the process of ruination is incomplete? What does it mean to live among ruins?

[Insert Figure 1: Abandoned chemical factory, Niagara Falls, New York, 2007]

This article reflects on methodological and ethical issues related to the ambivalent figure of the 'dereliction tourist', drawing on ethnographic research of three sites of industrial ruination in in North America, the UK, and Russia (Mah 2012). It contributes to debates about the ethics of researching marginalized people and places, including: critical literature on poverty tourism and dark tourism; tensions between ethnography and tourism; and wider sociological debates about the status of outsiders and insiders within social research (cf. cf. Galani-Moutafi 2000; Crang 2011 Lennon and Foley 2000; Sharpley and Stone 2009; White and Frew 2013; Rolfes 2010; Scheyvens 2001; Selinger and Outterson 2011; Meschkank 2011). I argue that dereliction tourism and ethnographic research in areas of industrial decline share ethical problems related to voyeurism, but that they also share more positive ethical possibilities through offering alternative ways of imagining places and raising social justice awareness of issues related to deprivation and blight. Furthermore, ethical dilemmas in the field should be addressed through intrinsically ethical research, based on principles, values, and sensitivity to a wide range of research contexts, rather than limited to identity-based reflexivity.

My ethnographic research was concerned with how people live in and among sites and processes of industrial ruination. The theoretical and methodological focus of my research was on places that had been 'left behind' in the context of an uneven geography of capitalist development (Harvey 1999; Smith 1984). More specifically, my focus was on places that were caught between being left behind and moving forward. The presence of industrial ruins can serve as a marker of such places. Benjamin (2000: 13) describes the 'ruins of the bourgeoisie' as 'petrified life' and 'residues of a dream world', traces of the inevitable forces of historical progress and industrial destruction. Drawing on the idea of capitalist development as 'creative destruction' (Schumpeter, 1965), Zukin (1991) argues that place is 'sharply divided between landscapes of consumption and devastation', and that 'liminal' places are thrown up in the shift between devastation and consumption, between destruction and re-creation. The three case studies that I explored— derelict chemical factories in Niagara Falls, USA/Canada; former shipyards in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK; and semi-abandoned textile factories in Ivanovo, Russia; and the communities surrounding these areas of industrial ruination— can be described as such places. Despite the different political, economic and spatial contexts, the cases shared the experience of being old industrial areas which had not yet recovered from decline and were on very uncertain paths towards 'post-industrial' recovery.

In each of the case studies, I conducted between twenty and thirty qualitative interviews with a range of local people including workers, former workers, residents, and community activists, as well as representatives from local government, trade unions, and the community and voluntary sector. I also undertook site and ethnographic observations, including spatial analysis of old industrial sites, driving and walking tours of neighbourhoods with research participants, and informal visits with residents in their homes, at community centres, and at various meeting places in their communities. But as I undertook my research, walking and driving around massive abandoned industrial sites in different countries, cities, and communities, I couldn't help feeling like a dereliction tourist traipsing around the globe chasing the aesthetic thrills of 'ruins porn'. Of course, I justified my research as qualitatively different from dereliction tourism-- as more ethical and reflexive-- but the comparison still bothered me. The average time spent in each case study site was two months, and the relatively brief period of time spent in each field site contributed to the sense of being not only an outsider but 'just' a tourist, passing through. This uncomfortable feeling of being a dereliction tourist persisted throughout my research. Rather than seeing this as a limitation, however, the figure of the dereliction tourist motivated me to think more critically about my role as an outsider.

There is something profoundly uncomfortable about researching marginalized people and places: the feeling of being a tourist, a voyeur, or a mass media vulture, drawn in by devastation and calamity. The wider problem of the 'philosopher and his poor' (Rancière, 2004) has been raised throughout the history of social research, yet it remains a critical challenge for ethically sensitive research in contexts of poverty and deprivation. Indeed, ethical issues of researching marginalized people and places relate to long-standing debates about 'insider' and 'outsider' research within ethnographic research (cf. Bridges, 2001; Cloke, et al, 2000; Minkler, 2004; Mullings, 1999; Woodward 2008). Researching areas of industrial decline involves a specific type of 'outsider' research which imposes explicitly negative associations of decline and ruination as the focus of the research. This negative focus arguably imposes value-laden assumptions into the research. My research revealed that landscapes of industrial ruination are typically viewed as 'ruined' or 'devastated' only by outsiders, rather than by local residents who tend to have strong attachment to their homes and communities. The figure of the dereliction tourist is an important ethical starting point for

reflecting on the role of the outsider in social research and on the uneasy relationship between the practices of tourism and ethnography (cf. Galani-Moutafi 2000; Crang 2011).

The dereliction tourist: reflections on distance and proximity

Dereliction tourism refers to the act of deliberately seeking out spaces of dereliction—disused warehouses, abandoned factories, and other sites of ruination—as sites for 'urban exploration' (cf. Ninjalicious 2005; Garrett 2010), aesthetic appreciation, and discovery. Virtual examples of dereliction tourism include Paul Talling's 'Derelict London' website devoted to derelict spaces in London (http://www. derelictlondon.com), Lowell Boileau's 'Fabulous Ruins of Detroit' web page which displays photos of decrepit buildings as evidence of the glorious past of the American industrial age (http://www. detroityes.com), and Uryevich's website 'Abandoned', which features photographs of abandoned plants, unfinished factories, and old industrial sites in the former Soviet Union (http://www.abandoned.ru). There have also been a number of coffee-table books devoted to photographs of industrial ruins, particularly focused on spectular sites of ruination such as Detroit (MacKenzie, 2001; Vergara, 1999; Marchand and Meffre, 2001; Austin and Doerr, 2010; Moore, 2010; Higgins, 1999). Closely related to dereliction tourism are aesthetic and cultural studies of industrial ruins which both mourn and celebrate these ruins as beautiful yet undervalued (cf. Edensor 2005; Vergara, 1999; Germain, 1990). Beyond the aesthetic qualities of ruins, dereliction tourists are also fascinated by the grand scale of disaster, of devastated industries, ghost towns, and contaminated brownfield sites.

Both the practice and the photography of 'ruins porn', in its various forms, have been criticized for voyeurism, 'inauthenticity' associated within being an 'outsider', and lack of cultural sensitivity (cf. High 2007; Clemens 2001; Mah 2012). These critiques parallel wider debates about the ethics of 'dark tourism' and 'poverty tourism'. 'Dark tourism' involves tourism to sites of death, trauma and atrocity, such as former concentration camps and prisons (Lennon and Foley 2000; Sharpley and Stone 2009; White and Frew 2013), while 'poverty tourism' refers to travel to poor areas as an alternative form of tourism (Rolfes 2010; Scheyvens 2001; Selinger and Outterson 2011; Meschkank 2011). However, some scholars have argued that these forms of representation and tourism of ruined, dark, and poor places also have positive possibilities. For example, Strangleman (2011) suggests that the visual imagery of industrial ruins associated with deindustrialization should not be dismissed as

simply ‘smokestack nostalgia’, but that this imagery reveals nuanced and often empathetic ways of making sense of the industrial past. Scheyvens (2001) argues that ‘poverty tourism’, if rooted in concerns for social justice, can provide an important counter-narrative to dominant forms of tourism and development. Similarly, Pezzullo (2007) argues that ‘toxic tourism’ in disadvantaged, polluted communities is an ethical, alternative form of tourism. In her ethnographic research, Pezzullo went on toxic tours that were organised by environmental activists to raise public awareness about the health dangers of contaminated sites. Unlike many scholars who draw sharp distinctions between the practices of ethnography and tourism, Pezzullo embraced her status as an outsider and as a tourist during her research, rather than seeing it as a limitation.

The difficult relationship between the self and the ‘other’ is an enduring and unavoidable challenge within ethnographic research. Ethnographers have attempted to shed their uncomfortable colonial heritage through the practice of reflexivity within the field, consciously attentive to power relations, subject positions, and ethically sensitive issues. However, ethnographers working in areas of poverty, particularly in international development contexts, continue to be criticized for neo-colonialism and exploitation both in terms of research theory and in terms of practice (cf. Madison, 2011; Rakowski, 1993; Sultana, 2007; Nagar and Ali, 2003). Nagar and Ali (2003: 2) suggest that many ethnographic approaches to reflexivity and positionality are inadequate, particularly in fieldwork-based international research, because ‘reflexivity has mainly focused on examining the identities of the individual researcher rather than on the ways in which those identities intersect with institutional geopolitical and material aspects of their positionality’. Indeed, many scholars have criticized ‘reflexivity’ trends within social research for focusing too self-indulgently on questions of the researcher’s own identity (cf. Adkins, 2002; May, 1998; Sayer, 2009). In my research, I was similarly critical of identity-based reflexivity, and following Nagar and Ali (2003), I aimed for a wider form of reflexivity based on intrinsic, contextually-based ethical reflection and practice.

Despite researchers’ attempts to be ‘reflexive’, in practice the boundaries between the ethnographer, the traveller, and the tourist are often blurred (Crang 2011; Galani-Moutafi 2000; Pezzullo 2007). On one level, the comparison between ethnography and tourism may seem overly critical. After all, tourists tend to be disliked, understood as culturally insensitive, ignorant of their surroundings, and linked to patterns of mass consumption. By

contrast, most contemporary ethnographers take great pains to ensure that they are reflexive and culturally sensitive. However, as Pezzullo (2007: 3) argues, 'most of us have been or will be tourists at some point in our lives… Disliking tourists, therefore, is really a way to express a dislike for ourselves, our culture, and who we have become.' Similarly, as Crang (2011: 205) argues,

> … it is a not uninformative conceit to play with the scandalous suggestion that the ethnographer and tourist are, if not the same creature then the same species and are part of the same continuum—that *homo academicus* might be uncomfortably closely related to that embarrassing relative *turistas vulgaris'*

This article takes up Crang's 'scandalous suggestion' that the ethnographer and the tourist are uncomfortably close, as a way of reflecting critically on the ethics of researching marginalized people and places. Early in my research process, I accepted my status as an outsider, but I was more reluctant to accept the analogy between my research and the role of the derelict tourist. However, I came to realize that the construction of the derelict tourist, and my own relationship to this ambivalent urban figure, was important for my research. In fact, I conducted my ethnographic research much like a visiting tourist on many occasions, accompanying several informants on walking tours or driving tours around neighbourhoods and old industrial sites. I also interviewed an environmental activist who had guided people on toxic tours of Niagara Falls in the 1980s, in the aftermath of the 1978 environmental disaster Love Canal (cf. Gibbs 1998), and I listened to a narrative recounting of the toxic tour.

Debates about insider versus outsider status relate to claims about 'authenticity' in both tourism and ethnographic research. Somehow, greater authenticity is associated with being on the 'inside', being close up, 'inside', getting the local worm's eye view- aspiring to the 'real' local experience of a place or a culture. Following traditions within standpoint theory, many qualitative researchers argue that it is important to share the 'subject' position of a research participant, particularly when researching vulnerable social groups, in order to 'give voice', to balance power relations, and to aspire towards more ethical and empowering accounts (cf. Hekman 1997; Harding 2004). Yet such chasing after 'authenticity', which is unobtainable if one is looking for it, tends to cloud the aims of investigation.

Another way of thinking about the insider-outsider debate is through the concepts of distance and proximity. Distance and proximity are key issues within phenomenological approaches to place, which focus on lived experience or 'dwelling' in place (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1989), and of the psycho-social 'affect' of being in place (Walkerdine 2010). Tensions between distant and proximity can be framed in terms of differences between 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' but also in terms of the ethics of the insider versus outsider, and the difference between 'spectacle' and 'practice'. Concern over the 'spectacle' of representing and researching vulnerable people and places is expressed in Sontag's (1979) criticism of moralist photography. Sontag argues that moralist photographers are attracted to tragedies, wars, social deprivation, and exploited subjects, echoing criticisms of 'dark tourism' and 'disaster tourism' (Lennon and Foley 2000; Sharpley and Stone 2009; White and Frew 2013). Sontag argues that moralist photographers aim to present the 'truth' through capturing these subjects, but an underlying voyeurism and emotional distance is at play:

> Protected middle-class inhabitants of the more affluent corners of the world – those regions where most photographs are taken and consumed – learn about the world's horrors mainly through the camera: photographs can and do distress. But the aestheticizing tendency of photography is such that the medium which conveys distress ends by neutralizing it. Cameras miniaturize experiences, transform history into spectacle. As much as they create sympathy, photographs cut sympathy, distance the emotions. (1979, p. 109-110).

The cultural historian Raymond Williams (1985, p. 126) makes a similar argument about landscape: 'the very idea of landscape implies separation and observation'. Bourdieu (1977, p. 1) has raised similar issues, highlighting the anthropologist's dilemma that the distance of impartial observation makes him/her 'condemned to see all practice as a spectacle'.

The concepts of distance and proximity have implications for methodology with regard to the relationship between the researcher and the researched. The concepts of distance and proximity have been explored within interdisciplinary literatures on cities, space, and urbanism. The urban social theorist Lefebvre (2003, p. 117) argues that proximity is one of the most important aspects of urban life: 'Nothing exists without exchange, without union, without proximity, that is, without relationships,' and he associates distance with urban problems and disorder: '(Social) relationships continue to deteriorate based on the distance, time, and space that separate institutions and groups. They are revealed in the (virtual) negation of that distance. This is the source of the latest violence inherent in the urban…'

(2003, p. 118) Making a similar case for proximity over distance, in a widely cited example, Michel de Certeau (1984) juxtaposes the privileged, bird's-eye view of New York City from the twin towers (pre-9/11) with ordinary and everyday experiences of people on the streets below. However, not all urban scholars privilege distance over proximity as perspectives in the city. For example, Walter Benjamin's celebrated 'flâneur', a term borrowed from Baudelaire, is a detached urban observer who strolls through the streets of a city, one who is keenly perceptive yet uninvolved, similar to the dereliction tourist.

Simmel (1997) argues that increases in physical proximity between individuals in rapidly expanding modern cities can lead to overstimulation, and urban dwellers thus learn to adopt a 'blasé metropolitan attitude' which is more detached and socially distant. As Tonkiss (2005) suggests, Simmel's perspective is not necessarily negative, but rather shows a sophisticated way of navigating the modern city with all its tensions and complexities. In fact, Simmel's (1950: 404) figure of the 'stranger' encapsulates qualities of both distance and proximity:

> The stranger is close to us, insofar as we fell between him and ourselves common features of a national, social, occupational, or generally human, nature. He is far from us, insofar as these common features extend beyond him or us, and connect us only because they connect a great many people.

Dereliction tourism and ethnographic research share similar tensions between insider and outsider perspectives, and between distance and proximity. Both aim to get close to landscapes of industrial ruination. Both make their journeys through the lens of a camera, through the window of a car, or through intrepid urban exploration trips into abandoned industrial spaces. Arguably, dereliction tourist and the ethnographer have different aims: the former seeks pleasure and excitement, while the latter seeks meaning and understanding. But both seek some form of 'authenticity' of experience, a phenomenological aim related to being in and experiencing place. While it is easy to point out the ethical problems and pitfalls associated with being a voyeur, a spectator, or a distant 'Othering' observer, there are more positive commonalities between dereliction tourists and ethnographers. They share a sociological imagination related to place-- a fascination, yes, but also the capacity for empathy and concern over social justice issues. For example, toxic tours of contaminated industrial wastelands have the power to motivate environmental activism among tourists because through their presence-- through *being there*, as Geertz (1988) famously describes the role of the ethnographer. They *witness* landscapes marked by toxic pollution; dereliction tourists and researchers *witness* abandoned industrial sites and communities, and call public

attention to their neglect. However, *being there* and being a *witness* are not necessarily positive; this depends very much on the way in which the tourist or the ethnographer engages with this experiential way of knowing. In his reflection on the ethnographic research in contemporary regimes of intervention, Marcus (2006) argues that the 'witness' has emerged as a key self-identity for the anthropologist. However, he suggests that this role is problematic, given its appeal to a disinterested, secular authority. In this article, I argue that ethical issues related to researching areas of industrial decline are intrinsic issues, related to matters of conscience, balance and reflection both in and beyond the research field.

Case study research

My starting point for thinking seriously about the ethics of 'dereliction tourism' in relation to my research occurred during the early stages of my research in Ivanovo, Russia. In part, the very process of selecting Ivanovo as a case study related to my sense of unease, as arguably it most closely resembled the 'ethos' of dereliction tourism. The first case study I selected, Niagara Falls, was closest to home for me as a Canadian, and it was inspired by driving through the North American Rust Belt on a cross-country tour. The boarded up downtowns and chemical factories lurking behind the splendour of the falls at Niagara (on both sides of the Canada-US border) seemed particularly jarring, as these were less 'expected' than the looming derelict factories of Detroit and Chicago. In the UK, I embarked on train journeys to visit old industrial cities around the country, particularly in the north, and talked with various local people and UK academics about landscapes of industrial ruination, until finally arriving at Newcastle upon Tyne as a UK case study. But I came to Ivanovo without ever having set foot in the city. My justification for selecting a Russian case at all was based on my theoretical and methodological interest in making global comparisons, my more specific research interest in post-Soviet transformation, and, practically speaking, an intermediate knowledge of Russian language and involvement in a research network on 'old industrial knowledges' which included scholars of both Western and Eastern European old industrial cities. As for Ivanovo itself, one of the key texts that drew me to select Ivanovo as a case study was not an academic source but rather, the following account from the 'Way to Russia' online tourist guide:

> Ivanovo is a grey and gloomy city, with relics of the Soviet times on every step. It'll be enough to pass it through by bus going between Vladimir and Kostroma, just keep your eyes wide open: the central noisy and dirty street with grey residential buildings

> and a big red church in the middle of all the mess; the faded impressive mosaics to glory the Soviet heroes, left here from the 70s; a dirty and noisy bus station with an old man playing accordion to cheer his fellow babushkas. (Way to Russia 2006)

The *Way to Russia* description of Ivanovo represents the city as having tourist value only because of its dereliction. The guide goes on to offer tourist advice but as a matter of last resort rather than choice: 'in case you're stuck in Ivanovo and feel sad that the trip that was teaching you so much about architecture and history was abruptly paused in this town…' and 'in case you like Ivanovo so much that you even decide to stay there, or (sorry) you're just stuck in the town, here's the list of a few hotels'. The *Way to Russia* guide is written by a team of Russians, and it is interesting to note here the 'outsider' perspective of Ivanovo articulated within a broader Russian context.

Ivanovo was once the biggest producer of textiles in the Soviet Union, and it prides itself on two nicknames: 'the Russian Manchester' as a textile powerhouse to rival the early industrial history of Manchester and the 'City of Brides' as a reference to the female-dominated historical textile workforce in the city. Neither epithet is particularly true within the post-Soviet context, as Ivanovo is no longer a thriving textile city, nor is its labour market dominated by women. Instead, Ivanovo is well-known as a post-Soviet city marked by industrial decline and the relics (murals, statues, street names, monuments) of Soviet times. I first arrived in Ivanovo in September 2006 by overnight train from St. Petersburg after studying Russian and living in St. Petersburg for one month. With the Way to Russia account in my mind, as well as other negative portrayals of the socio-economic context of the city, such as the *Shrinking Cities* working papers on Ivanovo (Kouznetsov 2004; Sitar and Sverdlov 2004; Treivish 2004) and accounts from residents of St Petersburg, I was expecting to find a city full of industrial ruins. I spent my first days wandering around the city, following the streets named after Communist leaders (Prospect Lenina, Karl Marx Boulevard, Friedrich Engels Boulevard) and recording my impressions of the ruined factories which lined the River Uvod. Throughout my time in the city, I revisited these sites, some during more extensive site observations, and others in passing during travels by transport or by car. The most striking impressions were during my first visits by foot, as the abundance and pervasiveness of these ruins seemed the most astonishing upon first glance, and the scale seemed largest when walking rather than passing by vehicle. I was impressed when

approaching these monumental sites for the first time by the scale, the aesthetic qualities, and indeed the spectacle of these ruins.

[Insert Figure 2. Abandoned textile factory, Ivanovo, Russia, 2006]

Yet viewed from so close, surrounded by broken glass and people drinking in the streets, the ruins very quickly took on a different quality. I experienced a sense of disjuncture, one captured in the following excerpt from my field notes on my first day exploring the city (7 Sep 2006):

> Reflections on distance and proximity: Industrial ruins are only 'spectacular' and 'sublime' from a distance. For example, as the 'Way to Russia' guide suggest, it's best to view the Soviet ruins as one passes through rather than stopping too long. I felt almost as soon as I arrived the social reality (stark, depressing, mundane) of living amongst such ruins. To call the ruins aesthetically beautiful is already to put oneself at a distance. It is a privileged position.

This reflection was an 'ethically important moment' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) because it caused me to reflect critically on my own assumptions and biases in undertaking this research. I realized that I had started with a distant approach, somewhere between Benjamin's (2000) 'flâneur' and Simmel's (1950) 'stranger', an outsider who seeks to 'read' an urban landscape, albeit a female outsider, in a different century. This seemed deeply inadequate for researching lived experiences within old industrial landscapes (cf. Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1989). After this reflection, my research gradually became increasingly focused on industrial ruination as a lived process, through a concern with investigating people's daily experiences and accounts of living in areas of industrial decline. Although I could never escape being an outsider, my research slowly shifted towards a greater understanding of multiple insider, outsider, and 'in-between' perspectives of industrial decline, with research participants' accounts including themes of strong place attachment to communities and homes, yet awareness of socio-economic deprivation and stigmatization. In moving from a focus on 'ruins' to 'ruination', I reoriented my focus from an aesthetic objectification of ruins towards a sociological and political understanding of ruination within the context of political economy and capitalism. As Stoler (2008: 196) argues, a focus on 'ruins' and 'ruination' is political:

> …ruination is more than a process. It is also a political project that lays waste to certain peoples and places, relations, and things... To focus on ruins is to broach the

> protracted quality of decimation in people's lives, to track the production of new exposures and enduring damage.

Another one of the most important ethical issues as an outsider emerged during the early stages of my research in Walker, a former shipbuilding community in the East End of Newcastle upon Tyne. At the time of my research (2005-2006), Walker was a predominantly white working class area with high levels of socio-economic deprivation, including trends of depopulation, limited public transport, few shops and services, dilapidated infrastructure, high levels of unemployment, delinquency, drug and alcohol use, and significant health inequalities and skills gaps. As in Ivanovo, I conducted a number of site observations of the former shipyards and old industrial sites and this was my first entrance into the field. However, my first 'ethically important moment' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) was not experienced during initial explorations of industrial ruination as in Ivanovo, but rather it occurred during the early stages of qualitative interviewing. The contrast between different 'first' ethically important moments, from the first entry into the field in Ivanovo and further into fieldwork with qualitative interviews in Newcastle, suggests the possibility of a sensorial order of ethnographic knowledge production in relation to the ethical and epistemological issues of the researcher. In other words, the greater sense of being an outsider in Ivanovo in terms of language, culture, and physical and psychological distance, may account for the difference in the ethical impacts of the visual between Ivanovo and Newcastle.

My first interview with someone from the Walker residential community in Newcastle was with a resident in Pottery Bank, a riverside area of council housing that was set to be demolished by the City Council in a controversial regeneration plan. I gained access to this interviewee through one of the Labour Councillors for the Walker ward, who was opposed to the regeneration of the area and blamed the Liberal Democrat-led City Council for the regeneration plan. The interview was arranged in the late afternoon at the resident's home. I made my way to the Pottery Bank area by public transport, allowing plenty of time since it was a new place and I was unfamiliar with the transport networks. I arrived at the area almost an hour before the arranged interview time. Glancing around the area, I saw that there were rows of council houses, several abandoned houses, some vacant lots where demolitions had already occurred, and cranes in the distance. However, there were no obvious places where a wandering passer-by could linger, such as a café, a shop, a public bench, a park, or a grassy

ledge. The only exception was a local pub which was located at the side of the road, just across from the Pottery Bank council houses.

[Insert Figure 3: Walker Road, with houses slated for demolition, 2006]

The pub had the appearance of a run-down old hotel. Although it did not seem particularly inviting for a lone female customer, I decided to venture inside while I waited for the interview. It seemed to be one of the few places where one could wait around, and I thought it might give me a sense of the people living in the area. The pub was filled with men, most of whom were upper middle-aged or older, although there was also an upper-middle-aged woman who was working behind the bar. I ordered a half pint of beer to earn my place as a customer in the pub (even though I knew a half pint was not a 'normal' beverage) and sat down. Of course, I immediately felt that I had been identified as an outsider. Just a moment after finding a seat, a man, probably in his fifties, approached me. He said that he knew I was a student—'a student of social behaviour' was his guess. I somewhat sheepishly confirmed that I was indeed a student of sociology. He said he thought so, in what seemed to me to be a mocking although good-humoured way. He added that he was not stupid, that he was clever, and he knew what I was up to. He'd seen it before. That was more or less the extent of our exchange. I didn't feel particularly threatened, although I definitely felt uncomfortable. I didn't speak with any of the other people in the pub but finished my half pint fairly quickly and left. I lingered a little longer, pacing around the streets in the neighbourhood, so that I wouldn't be too early for my interview. As I later learned, even if I had been male and white and roughly the same age as the people in this pub, I would still have been identified as an outsider. In fact, a middle-aged Newcastle male resident later told me that he would not enter this pub, for fear of being seen as an obvious outsider. It was that type of a local pub, and one which until recently was a working man's club and formally did not allow women. The idea of having seen social researchers before was in fact a recurring theme throughout my research, as the industrial decline in Newcastle, particularly around shipbuilding, has been long and protracted, dating from the 1970s, and the subject of many local documentaries, books, and reports. This pub experience caused me to reflect on my status as an outsider and as a sociologist within the research context, although in contrast with my experience in Ivanovo, I felt more like a naïve 'outsider' who had been caught off guard and wandered outside her comfort zone, rather than a dereliction tourist.

After my experience at the pub, I crossed the street to visit the residents of Pottery Bank. The children playing around the houses asked who I was visiting, and a neighbour from up the street let me in to the house, as I arrived a few minutes early. There seemed to be an awareness throughout the neighbourhood that I was a visitor and also that I was expected. I had gained consent for the interview over the telephone, and I did my best to explain my research project to the resident in advance of our discussion. I had only approached one resident, who lived in the house that I was visiting, but she had invited a neighbour to join the discussion. Both of the residents were very talkative and forceful in presenting their ideas, and very quickly my interview topic guide was abandoned. Basically, the residents seemed to see me as someone who wanted to hear, and could possibly do something about, their cause for concern. These residents were distressed because their council houses were under threat of demolition from the City Council-led regeneration plan that was about to go ahead, despite 'community consultation' processes. They pointed out how sturdy their homes were, how much effort they had put into their homes over the years, how their homes represented generations of families and memories, and how they feared being separated from their extended families (interview, 12 September 2005). They also mentioned numerous incidents of severe mental health problems that they attributed to the stress of their situations, including mental anguish, depression, panic attacks, and other psychological ailments. The interview ended up being an extended discussion about the residents' fears and anger over proposed demolitions to their homes, and their active community-led campaign against the demolitions. Neither resident seemed concerned with my research but rather with advancing their campaign against the demolition of their homes. In this context, I was appealed to through my status as an outsider, as a visitor, to witness and to listen to the injustices of the residents. Throughout the interviews, I faced the issue of needing to manage the interviewees' expectations of help or support with their campaign against the City Council-led regeneration plan. I had to restate my status as a researcher rather than an activist, although I was sympathetic to their cause. In writing up my research, I became conscious of the capacity, as well as the limitations, of my research to give 'voice' to marginalized people, both through *being there*, as a witness, and through the narratives that I had heard. This relates to the idea of the 'ethnographic confessional', and the role of the ethnographer as 'witness' in research (cf. Crang 2011; Marcus 2006). It also resonates with Simmel's (1950: 403) reflection on the simultaneous nearness and remoteness of the stranger, who 'often receive receives the most surprising openness—confidences which sometimes have the character of a confessional and which would be carefully withheld from a more closely

related person'. My research was critical of the City Council's short-sighted regeneration plans and discussed alternative, grassroots ways of 'imagining' change in the area. However, I was also mindful of the limitations of such claims and ambitions for social research; the regeneration went ahead as planned, the residents lost their homes, and property-led regeneration continues to be a dominant model of urban redevelopment in areas of industrial decline.

In my third case study of Niagara Falls, where I conducted research in spring 2007, I experienced similar issues as an outsider, despite the fact that this was the closest to home. Niagara Falls brought out issues of being both an insider and an outsider, similar in some ways through regional background and accent, but different through other social identities such as class and ethnicity (cf. Mullings 1999; Sultana 2007). Although I was very clearly an outsider in Niagara Falls as researcher of industrial ruination, I felt the least like a dereliction tourist in the case. However, this was not related to relative outsider status but rather to how the old industrial sites were perceived by local people in this context. In both Niagara Falls, Ontario and Niagara Falls, New York, numerous old industrial sites have been officially classified as 'brownfields', areas with either real or perceived levels of toxic contamination, and they are seen very clearly by both official and local populations as problems and issues that are worthy of social and environmental investigation. Nobody took offense at my research interests in 'decline', and in many cases my interest was welcomed as refreshing and politically important for mobilizing grassroots activism in an overlooked city, rather than as insulting or tiresome. This fits with the analysis of the ethnographer or tourist as 'outsiders' in sites of dereliction and contamination as a 'witnesses' to social justice issues (cf. Crang 2011; Marcus 2006). The concept of toxic tourism (Pezzullo 2007) was a key theme that emerged from this research. Concerned residents told me about told about toxic tours that they had done in Niagara Falls in the 1980s, in the aftermath of Love Canal (the infamous environmental disaster of 1978), and I was guided on informal toxic tours through poor African-American and working- class residential neighbourhoods in close proximity to abandoned chemical factories. Residents and workers discussed their experiences of living with cancer, respiratory illnesses, and other health problems related to living near or working in chemical factories. They also described the pain and difficulty of living through industrial decline: unemployment rose as chemical factories and other heavy industries closed down; downtown shops and streets fell into disrepair; and people moved out of the city. Many residents and workers felt a sense of injustice, at having been left behind, in contaminated

and poor areas, but most were reluctant to blame the companies which had been the lifeblood of their communities. The two problems, pollution and unemployment, were inextricably linked. My experience of *being there*, doing research in and among the ruins, was important for gaining an understanding into the social and environment issues. I was only there for a short time, as an outsider who closely resembled a dereliction tourist. Nonetheless, I was able to draw attention to a neglected area, 'left behind' in the uneven geography of capitalist development, with hazardous toxic wastelands largely hidden from wider public awareness.

[Insert Figure 4: Smokestack views, Highland Avenue, Niagara Falls, New York, 2007]

The uneasy feeling of being a dereliction tourist was a key ethical issue that I faced during my field research in all three areas of industrial decline. The concerns were firstly about the risk of causing offense, distress or irritation to research participants if I was exposed in this apparent role. Secondly, the concerns were more phenomenological (Cresswell, 2004; Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1989), related to the important role of *being there* as a witness in marginalized areas (Geertz 1988; Clang 2011; Marcus 2006). This raises ethical questions about how to respond to research participants' expectations about advancing social justice issues, but it also highlights the more positive role than outsiders can play in research contexts. The ethical issue of the sense of being a 'dereliction tourist' was an intrinsic ethical issue, as it related to the researcher's conscience, principles, and sensitivities and did not break any specific ethical codes or pose clear ethical dilemmas. Following numerous other scholars on insider and outsider research, my research revealed advantages and disadvantages associated with both insider and outsider perspectives, and pointed to the blurriness in practice between insider/outsider dichotomies. It also challenged assumptions about the role of the dereliction tourist in relation to the ethnographer, which are in fact closely related.

Conclusion

These ethical reflections on the ambivalent figure of the 'dereliction tourist' provide sociological insights for thinking critically about the relationships between outsider and insider perspectives, between perspectives of distance and proximity, and between ethnography and tourism. During the process of my research, I became increasingly critical of dereliction tourism and aesthetic approaches to ruins for romanticizing culture and aesthetics, and for neglecting people and the economy. However, I also realized that as a

researcher in landscapes of industrial ruination, I closely resembled a dereliction tourist and I could not fully escape such a resemblance. Indeed, the spectre of the dereliction tourist haunted me throughout the research. Rather than running away from it, I came to realize that it offered a valuable ethical reference point through which to frame my research. Both dereliction tourism and ethnographic research in areas of industrial decline share ethical problems, in that they risk voyeurism, romanticization, and the reproduction of stigmatization (cf. Clemens, 2011; High, 2007; Rolfes 2010; Selinger and Outterson 2011; Meschkank 2011). At the same time, they both also offer the potential for alternative ethical possibilities through the insights that can be revealed through *being there* as a witness in different people and places (cf. Pezzullo, 2007; Scheyvens 2001; Crang 2011; Marcus 2006). The sense of unease of social observation as 'spectacle' (Bourdieu, 1979) is endemic to qualitative social research and should be faced honestly rather than ignored or swept aside. The negotiation of complex, blurred roles in the research field as an outsider, visitor, tourist, activist, ethnographer, activist, and human being require careful reflection in relation to intrinsic ethical issues (cf. Crang 2011; Galani-Moutafi 2000).

The sociological implications of this paper also extend beyond the specific context of doing research in areas of industrial ruination. For example, this paper challenges: the focus on identity-based reflexivity within ethnographic research as a panacea for ethical dilemmas; the status of the ethnographer as being qualitatively different from other 'outsiders' such as tourists; and wholly negative associations with 'outsiders'. These methodological reflections also offer an alternative way of approaching reflexivity within field research, based on intrinsically ethical research. Both outsider and insider research, if conducted sensitively and according to ethical principles and values, offer important insights in social research (cf. Bridges, 2001; Cloke et al, 2000; Minkler, 2004; Mullings, 1999). Moreover, the boundaries between insider and outsider research perspectives are difficult to maintain. During the process of researching areas of industrial decline, stigmatization was a key problem in terms of urban policy and self-image. Thus, intrinsic ethical issues emerged which related to matters of conscience and sensitivity rather than to unwieldy ethical dilemmas or specific ethical codes. These more subtle ethical issues should not be underestimated, as it is important for the researcher to be able to feel that the research has been conducted in an ethical way. In making a case against doing covert research, Homan (1980) makes the case that conducting unethical research is harmful not only for the research participants but also for the researcher, who has to manage stress and anxiety related to deception. In this way,

intrinsically ethical research, based on principles, values, and sensitivity to a wide range of research contexts (cf. Nagar & Ali, 2003), seems to be of great importance, whatever the scale of the ethical issue. At the same time, it is important to recognise that it is impossible when dealing with the complexities of social research to completely avoid the emergence of tricky ethical issues and dilemmas. By revealing some of the early 'ethically important moments' (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004) of this study, as well as the differences between different case studies within the same research project, the article also shows how ethics is not just about professional codes of conduct but part of a practice-based learning process.

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